

Koforidua Statement on digital education in protestant schools

The spectrum of protestant schools around the world is very broad, also in view of digitalisation. While some schools have just one computer available for all teachers and students together, other schools have an extensive inventory of digital teaching resources. It is therefore not easy to draw up a statement that applies equally to all schools and countries. However, the participants of the GPENreformation conference in Koforidua, Ghana, coming from four continents and very different economic and social situations, are facing up to this challenge concerning a common statement with the protestant profile of thousands of schools worldwide in digital education.

The participants of the Koforidua-conference are fully aware of the dangers and limitations of digitalisation, such as the increasing dependence of people on technology, the high addiction factor among children and adults alike, the ethical distortions due to unbounded and anonymous forms of communication or even growing income disparities because of unequal distribution of digital connectivity. Nevertheless, the participants of the Koforidua-conference want to emphasise the opportunities of digitalisation for educational processes, for more social justice, for the spread of democratic ideas in the world, and for inclusion. They are also aware that digital processes in education cannot completely replace analogue processes. But there need to be the same standards of digital education in all countries and continents so certain parts of the world shall no longer fall behind in terms of development.

The participants of the Koforidua-conference are convinced that protestant schools can play a pioneering role in advancing digitalisation in their countries by preparing students adequately for living and working in the digital world. To this end, the current situation in schools needs to be analysed, the question of how to develop technical requirements must be addressed and new challenges need to be faced. Digitalisation and the development of digitality in education are a process. Action based local solutions are the first starting point. In this sense, the participants of the Koforidua-conference are following the example of Martin Luther, who did not simply speak, but acted: at first, he published his 95 theses, then dispute followed, then the Christian church changed its outlook.

So let us now turn to the theses, which are intended to encourage, to implement, to develop and to optimise digital education in all protestant schools worldwide. At first, the theses are geared towards the needs of the students, for whom digitalisation is nowadays much more natural than for previous generations. Subsequently they deal with the perspective of the teachers for whom digitalisation represents a significant change to their previous teaching methods. Beyond that, they address the ethical standards which need to be redefined in terms of digitalisation before they finally thematise the technical requirements making appropriate digital education possible.

From November 5 until November 10, 2023, around 100 education officials and teachers from the Global Pedagogical Network joining in reformation (GPENreformation) met in Koforidua, Ghana, at a conference to discuss issues of digitality in protestant education. The theses below were developed in workshops during the conference and reflect the different perspectives of the participants.

GPENreformation is an international Network of Protestant Schools committed to Community Service, global social Justice, Peace Education, Democracy, the Integrity of Creation, Sustainability, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Responsibility for social Development and the Improvement of high educational Standards in their Countries.

A. Students as digital learners

1. Students are motivated and able to do internet-research and use the internet as a tool.
2. Students take responsibility in self-organised learning discoveries.
3. Students are valued as individual learners.
4. Students as well as their parents and their teachers need guidance to navigate safely in virtual spaces.
5. Students deserve appropriate safe digital tools.

B. Teachers as guides and learners

1. Teachers are discovering a new pedagogical land.
2. Teachers and students are partners in the learning process. They learn from each other in an everyday struggle of reconciling interests.
3. The role of the teachers changes from the presenter of content to the professional guide in an educational process by discovering information, gaining knowledge, sharing joy in new possibilities, and avoiding data robbery.
4. Teachers organize the development of rules in a participatory process together with the parents and the students.
5. Teachers are deciding which content in the curriculum is adequate for a digital access.
6. Digital tools help teachers to meet individual needs and assist with students critical thinking.

C. Protestant Ethics as Guideline for the School Culture in the digital Era

1. Bringing technology and pedagogy together needs regulation and participation.
2. Respect of the rights of students and the rights of teachers as well as protection of privacy and dignity of other persons should be enhanced by the digitalisation of education in protestant schools.
3. The church is a creature of the word of God. Digitalisation is another form of communication and a new chance for spreading the gospel in religious education.
4. Protestant schools need to take responsibility to support the students in learning to understand and enhance social justice in the digitalisation of education.
5. Digitalisation needs to become a schooling process of peace building and sustainable development.

D. Technical requirements

1. The establishment and continuous upgrade of robust technological infrastructure is the foundation of digital education.
2. The synchronization process of ICT development and professional development needs to be organised.
3. Adequate technology is essential for teachers today.
4. Fair chances for all students in the digital era require enough devices for every school in every country.
5. All structures (families, society, economy, politics) need to assume their responsibility in providing an appropriate digital environment.